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ABSTRACT

Recommendations to help student interns in administrative positions maximize their educational opportunities vis-a-vis the "real world" and to also help them avoid certain placement-associated problems. The suggestions may be helpful to both new and established internship directors as well. Attention is focused on governmental administrative placements. In terms of specific student needs, four basic goals are addressed: providing prospective interns with an idea of what to expect in a field placement, providing students with information so that they can intelligently decide whether to participate in an internship, forewarning students about problems that may be encountered, and enabling students to survive the internship and to maximize the possible benefits associated with their educational experience. In particular, advice is presented on the following concerns: feeling "dumb," punctuality, reading newspapers, establishing a work schedule, what to wear, asking questions, being an extrovert, the lunch hour, honesty, measuring one's performance, appreciating the secretary, informal overtime, sex roles, teamwork, "burning bridges," doing good work, keeping a closed mouth, dating practices, meeting with exiting interns, insolvable problems, the older worker, and the organization of the internship. (SW)

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MAXIMIZING THE BENEFITS OF AN ADMINISTRATIVE INTERNSHIP: SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE

by

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ABSTRACT

Numerous individuals have boasted about the benefits associated with internship placements in administrative agencies. It is generally accepted that such experiential learning is invaluable because it offers students access to the "real world," "practical working experience," and so forth. Unfortunately, few if any of these writers explain what students can expect to learn from such experiences. This article presents and discusses several axioms or maxims, if you will, that are applicable to most administrative internships. The goal here is to provide information that will maximize the practical benefits associated with an administrative internship.

INTRODUCTION

In her recent analysis of internship programs, Hughes (1981:4) observed:

> Since their inception in the 1930's, internship programs have come to be regarded as eminently more effective at developing quality administrators than on-campus programs, which consist mainly of the acquisition of knowledge by way of bookish training. Despite this belief, the amount and quality of publications on internship programs are indeed limited, it is almost a silent subject. The articles written on internship programs primarily contain general, often vague, information. The books are few.

Similarly, Henry (1979:231) referred to this shortcoming as "...the relative vacuum that exists concerning our knowledge about internships in governments across the country."

This scarcity of research cannot be associated with the assumption that the internship concept will soon disappear. McCaffery's (1979:241) writings imply, instead, that internships are here to stay.

Of the materials published about internships, there is frequent reference to the fact that these programs are useful because they expose students to something called the "real world." Writers on the subject employ numerous vague references in describing the benefits associated with such experiential learning. A sampling of these descriptions suggests that internships are valuable because of their ability to offer access to "practical experience" (Caile, 1972:45; Honan, 1975:3; Baker, 1963:178; and, Finkle and Barclay, 1979:236), "practical working experience" (Carlson, 1971:26), "real life work" (Fonville, 1978:6), "the real world" (McCaffery, 1979:242), and "a 'feel' for Realpolitik" (Villa-neuva, 1974:185). Honan (1975:4) argues that internships expose students to a "maturing process."

Still others reason,

> ...internship programs were necessary because they helped...: To provide a transition from academic theory to actual practice (McGee, 1974:227).

> The professional administrative internship facilitates the transition between classroom theory and everyday practice (Finkle and Barclay, 1979:236).
>
> To assist in the transition from the academic to the working environment, Presidential Management Internships provide a series of developmental experiences (Campbell and Strakasch, 1979:234).
>
> At least part of the rationale for that commitment is that the internship is considered an investment in the future, a way of reducing the front-end costs of learning the labyrinthine byways of complex organizations (McCaffery, 1979:241).

These references demonstrate that even when internships are the subject of academic discussion, writers maintain a rather vague notion of the benefits associated with applied study. Everyone seems to agree that there is a "real world" out there just waiting to teach some of its valuable lessons via "practical experience." Unfortunately, nobody is equally willing to speculate about some of the lessons that students can expect to learn through an internship.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The following paragraphs offer several suggestions and further discussion regarding this void in the internship literature. Specifically, the present study presents and comments upon several lessons, or "rules," if you will, that are seen as components of what interns will encounter in their "real world" placements. In short, we hope to provide students with both a preview of and some "tips" about the internship. Furthermore, it is understood that although most of what follows is applicable to all internships, this discussion focuses only on governmental administrative placements. Legislative, medical, and all other applied study internships are excluded from the discussion. Quite simply, this reflects the authors' limitations, that is, our direct experiences have been confined to the governmental administrative internship.

The ensuing suggestions can be utilized in at least three ways. First, for a beginning internship director, they should provide a greater understanding vis-a-vis the nature and circumstances of an administrative internship. In other words, it is hoped that after reading the following paragraphs, the new director will have an enhanced appreciation of what to "look for" and "what to expect" in his/her new role.

Second, the more established director may wish to select from among these suggestions those most relevant to his/her program and present them as a lecture and/or orientation. Obviously, it is implied that the director's presentation will also include personal observations drawn from his/her past internship experiences.

Finally, the director may simply require that students read the article and then use it as the basis for discussion in one or more orientation seminars. The reader will further note that our remarks are presented as

though designed to be read directly by an intern, somewhat like writing a teacher's manual for students. Our assumption was that if faculty members wish to use some or all of what follows as lecture materials, he/she would have no difficulty in extracting information relevant to his/her unique needs.

In terms of specific student needs, the present study has four basic goals. First, it provides interns with some idea of "what to expect" in a field placement. A second and related goal is the hope that by acquiring a better understanding of the expectations and obligations involved, students can make more intelligent decisions whether to participate in an internship. Third, students will be forewarned about certain problems that may be encountered in an internship. Where appropriate, suggestions are offered concerning how interns may either avoid or resolve certain placement-related problems. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is hoped that this discussion will enable students not only to survive the internship, but also maximize the possible benefits associated with this educational experience.

LESSONS FROM THE REAL WORLD

The following paragraphs present advice and discussion relevant to governmental administrative internships. They are presented in no specific order, since each in its own way is considered to be of equal importance.

Feeling Dumb. Preceding the first work day, you should grant yourself at least three or four months during which time you refuse to feel "dumb." No matter the academic background, everyone requires time to learn job-related names, politics, personalities, and so forth. Oftentimes, interns panic and become depressed over their self-confessed ignorance. Do not advertise your feelings of stupidity. One intern suggested that upon beginning a placement he was overwhelmed by the problem of keeping everything organized in his mind.

It always seemed that during those times of his greatest bewilderment, someone in the office would ask him, for example, to "Call Mr. X next Thursday at 3:00 p.m." To avoid the possibility of forgetting this or some other important assignment, he began writing these messages on a notecard that he always carried in his vest pocket. This he found to be a very effective method for remembering both work and school related requirements. Perhaps more importantly, this seemingly simple procedure helped him gain a reputation as a responsible professional, even when this memory strategy involved something as simple as arranging a luncheon meeting with someone who had raised this possibility during a previous encounter.

Give yourself time to learn about the new job. Patience is the best and perhaps only cure for the problem of "feeling dumb."

Punctuality. One of the quickest ways for an intern to enhance his/her reputation involves the simple tactic of being at work ten to fifteen minutes early. This may be an especially effective procedure for addressing a problem often inherent in an internship. Specifically, interns working a part-time schedule can face some resentment from permanent employees, who think the student is somehow "getting away with something" because he/she works only, say, twenty hours per week. This problem may be unavoidable even in cases where a co-worker has had the internship program structure explained to him/her.

By starting the workday early and remaining ten minutes beyond quitting time, the student may counteract many of these prejudices. At the same time, if part or all of the internship represents a full-time placement, this "start early stay late" tactic has added benefits. A daily "hell-o" and "good-bye"

offered by an intern who is busy at his/her desk can reduce his/her chances of being considered solely in terms of the "student" role. Furthermore, by being in the office before or after regular hours, you may be privy to valuable insights and information that is sometimes available only in a more informal, extra-work-schedule environment.

Conversely, tardiness can damage your workplace reputation. If you are constantly late to work, other full-time staffers will eventually resent the boss' apparent double standard. Morale problems may ensue. If these difficulties become a hindrance, the internship may be terminated.

Finally, there are occasions when you cannot avoid being tardy. Your car may break down or your water pipes may freeze. In an emergency take time to call beforehand and explain that you will be late. Remember, explanations before the fact have a high probability of being considered informative, whereas ex post facto explanations may be viewed as an afterthought.

Reading Newspapers. If you have not been an avid reader of local newspapers, this is a habit you should acquire. Such readings will greatly facilitate your understanding of agency related events. Besides focusing on the more descriptive news items, pay attention to the editorial page. Get to know the names of important local issues, agencies, and individuals (both public and private). Furthermore, by reading items concerning national and international events, you acquire a greater understanding of the interrelationship among various levels of government. Eventually, you will find yourself becoming much more concerned with other less publicized political events. For instance, interns report that they pay much closer attention to court decisions.

Finally, be forewarned that for the first several weeks you may find this detailed reading somewhat difficult. Be patient, it takes time to learn all

the names and places. In fact, this unfamiliarity can be to your advantage. Use your reading related questions to begin conversations and friendships with the full-time staff.

Establishing a Work Schedule. If your placement is less than full time, it is important that you give consideration as to how your work schedule is organized. We suggest that during our program's twenty hour placement period interns arrange to work five four-hour days, preferably mornings. This schedule provides several advantages. First, it means the student will be seen working every day. When interns work two and one-half consecutive days per week, this can represent a four day interval (including weekends) between agency contacts. Fellow workers should receive a daily reminder of your presence in the work force.

Second, this schedule gives you a daily reading of what is occurring within the agency. If you never work Thursday, for example, you may be missing the weekly staff meetings. Also, if the agency has a crisis, it is important that you be there to watch how things are resolved. It is better to witness the resolution of a catastrophe versus hearing or reading about it.

Finally, mornings are a good time to work because many people arrive at work rested and ready to "address the issues," as one student observed. This may explain why several interns reported that a disproportionate number of meetings were scheduled for mornings. By afternoon, many employees will have drifted off to other offices and/or buildings to conduct both scheduled and unscheduled discussions.

It is important to attend agency meetings. Here you can meet new people, witness the interchange of ideas and, perhaps, eventually make significant

contributions to the discussion. By working mornings, you enhance the possibility of being available for these meetings.

What to Wear. Although student interns are not expected to make Blackwell's Ten Best Dressed List, you should "dress-up" as much as possible. Clothes do affect how people are viewed and treated. If you wear jeans, sandals and a T-shirt, do not be surprised if you are not regarded with professional respect. Likewise, understand that such evaluations may restrict your integration into the agency's social network. Needless to say, if this happens, you will not maximize the educational benefits associated with the internship.

Enhancing a wardrobe may be less expensive than you think. One intern bought most of his "new" clothing by spending one Saturday afternoon at local yard sales. He acquired a rather impressive wardrobe for less than fifty dollars.

It should be further understood that if you start your placement by wearing jeans and a T-shirt, it is difficult to change into new garb and expect agency personnel to suddenly discard previous perceptions. One student explained the problem this way, "It's tough to unring a bell."

The above discussion is not meant as a sales pitch for high fashion. It is simply a recognition that if you choose to fight certain attitudes, you should appreciate the consequences. If the internship is seen as a valuable opportunity to learn about the interworkings of a social organization, understand that the amount of knowledge you acquire may be strongly associated with something as seemingly mundane and elementary as your appearance.

On Being an Extrovert. The value of an internship is closely related to what you can contribute. Since the agency is an association of individuals, you should develop your people skills. Even if you are an unabashed

introvert, expect to change your ways. Begin by asking questions. Develop your listening talents. Do not be surprised if you gain a reputation for being a "good conversationalist" solely on the basis of your ability to ask questions.

Another necessary "extrovert talent" is being the one who initiates conversations, for example, speaking to someone in the hallway. Ask him/her how things are going. If there was a recent birth in the family, ask about the baby.

This does not mean that you are expected to emulate a television game show host. Instead, we are noting the importance of developing interpersonal skills. People generally like and enjoy associating with extroverts. You will also find that your initial feelings of loneliness will quickly recede if you are willing to initiate conversations. This is especially true for interns whose placement is in a new academic environment and/or a new town.

Ask Questions. The intern role has certain distinct advantages. One is that you can ask lots of questions without fear of being labeled "dumb." In fact, the opposite is true. Students who constantly inquire about their agency are usually viewed as "inquisitive" and/or "eager to learn." So, ask questions, lots of questions.

Several interns reported that during the initial stages of the placement, they scheduled weekly or twice-weekly meetings with other office workers in order to ask questions. Others utilized the, "Let's get lunch together" strategy if an agency person was extraordinarily busy. The most effective procedure was for the intern to have a list of questions to use as a basis for the discussion. This tactic conveys a sense of order and organization on the intern's part. Furthermore, agency supervisors report that students who develop a reputation for maintaining confidentiality in response to these

discussions have a much greater change of receiving precise answers to more delicate questions.

This last point suggests, in turn, one caution regarding inquisitiveness. Use discretion in asking questions. Intuitively, the intern should understand that certain answers must be inferred from listening to agency gossip. In short, do not ask tactless questions. As one veteran intern observed, "You suddenly understand what is meant by 'Discretion is the better part of valor.'" In this regard, listening to office chatter is an effective method of establishing criteria for determining placement related questions.

The Lunch Hour. One of the best investments you can make is to eat lunch with co-workers. This strategy has several benefits. For example, listening to lunch time conversations can provide a crash course in learning who's who in the agency. Furthermore, if you eat with veteran staff members, you can acquire a greater understanding of the agency's history and place. The informal atmosphere often associated with these lunches provides a change to ask more detailed questions than you could during a hurried office chat. Likewise, you can expect more specific answers than would be offered during formal work hours. This can help you acquire a more in-depth understanding of your new employer.

Third, because of the informal environment, these lunches provide a quick way of getting to know other office workers.

Finally, you should assume responsibility or initiating these events. Do not be afraid to ask people out for lunch. This may be especially necessary for someone in the office who dislikes you simply because you are a student intern (Believe it or not, this happens sometimes.). Take the initiative. Be humble and ask others to join you at noon. Generally, these lunches are rewarding in terms of both acquiring information and developing friendships.

Rearranging Your Agency. One mistake often made by interns concerns their interest in "cleaning up" the organization's problems. This may result from the student's inability to tolerate the agency's deviation from a textbook model. For example, suppose an employee is always late to work and often falls asleep at her desk. Do not suggest to the boss that she be fired. You may be embarrassed when the boss tells you that the woman has an independent project and usually works several hours beyond quitting time. Anyway, in her twenty years with the Department she has published two books and he (the boss) is privileged that she has turned down several other job offers in order to remain with the agency. You get the picture? Employees accumulate "idiosyncrasy points" and you must learn to discover and appreciate these attributes.

Our recommendation is that you maintain total silence for, say, the first six months regarding your suggestions about enhancing agency efficiency. The agency is as it is for a reason. Your first responsibility is to discover these reasons. This may save you untold embarrassment.

The argument here is not necessarily, "Whatever is, is right," to quote Alexander Pope. Instead, it is suggested that whatever is, is, perhaps, because it works. Understand why things are as they are before you begin a revolution. Confine your suggestions to those times when they are requested.

Honesty. There is perhaps some degree of truth in every maxim. Nevertheless, interns were almost unanimous in agreeing that, indeed, "Honesty is the best policy."

Generally, placements entail a two step process. Everyone begins the internship with a "clean slate." As students attend to their work assignments, situations arise where they are required to provide information to someone in the agency. If an intern gains a reputation for "playing it

straight," he/she begins that long process of building a sound professional reputation. Several students agreed that in the end the most important agency currency is a good reputation.

Specific intern examples should further clarify this proposal. For instance, if you forget to return a phone call, do not create a story about some imaginary meeting you were attending. If the caller somehow discovers that there was no such meeting, your reputation may suffer irreparable damage.

Another intern noted that someone in her office sometimes claimed the same political philosophy as the person to whom she was speaking. She was eventually nicknamed "Proteus," although nobody dared use the name in her presence.

One intern probably best summarized the Honesty prescription when he observed, "You learn right away that the night has a thousand eyes."

Obviously, there are times when telling the whole truth may be impossible. For example, if the supervisor asks if you have heard anything about her husband dating another woman, you may wish to give a considered response, especially if her husband is the intern director and you have, indeed, heard these rumors. You may cross your fingers and report that you know nothing about these allegations. The prescription is that this latter approach be employed with considerable discretion.

Measuring Your Performance. At first, many interns expect to be congratulated upon successfully completing a difficult project or assignment. When such rewards are not forthcoming, the intern redoubles his/her efforts on the next assignment. Following the successful completion of this project, he/she again finds little if any positive reinforcement. Then the depression begins. Feelings such as "They don't like me" and "I must not be doing very well" become commonplace.

Do not be disturbed by this lack of reinforcement. It is more important to understand that as long as you are performing well, nobody complains. On the other hand, seldom will you receive accolades and compliments.

If you successfully complete two hundred assignments and bungle the two hundred and first, chances are you will hear only of your mistake. This is especially true if you are required to deal directly with the public. Notwithstanding the common complaint about "inefficient bureaucrats," citizens expect and demand excellent service. Again, if you provide extraordinary services to five hundred clients and then botch the next one, be assured that when your supervisor receives a formal written communication concerning your efforts, it will be from that one person complaining about your substandard performance.

Simply stated, people both inside and outside the agency are more inclined to write letters of complaint rather than letters of praise. It appears that anger or displeasure is a greater literary motivator than are feelings of happiness and satisfaction.

There is no known solution to this problem, other than recognizing its existence. You may need to remind yourself that, "No news is good news."

Appreciate the Secretary. Several interns reported that the first and perhaps most important thing they recognized was that there was one person most likely to answer almost all of their questions. This person seemed to understand the agency's formal and informal structures and relationships. Students were speaking, of course, of the secretary (ies).

Since they are frequently viewed as lower status employees vis-a-vis salary and promotion enhancement, there is an understandable tendency to underrate the secretaries' contributions. Do not be trapped by this illusion. There is a strong correlation between the intern's willingness to recognize

and appreciate the secretary and the ease with which he/she accommodates his/her agency placement.

Secretaries are helpful in numerous and obvious ways. You will find, for example, that the secretary can answer most "beginner" questions, ranging from who's who to what's what.

These underrated talents are evident when considered from a practical standpoint. For instance, the office can be viewed as a communications network; both written and spoken information circulate through the office. The secretary is generally at or near the center of these communications. Secretarial activities frequently involve, for example, taking telephone messages, typing correspondence, arranging meetings and conferences, and overhearing much of the informal office conversation. It is not difficult to appreciate why many interns report that, oftentimes, a secretary has the greatest understanding of office politics and dynamics.

The word "secretary" provides another clue concerning the importance of this role. The letters s-e-c-r-e-t reveal an etymological basis for understanding the secretary's responsibilities. Since part of his/her duties involve transcribing other people's written and spoken communications, he/she is, by definition, privy to a wealth of information regarding the agency, its employees and their relationship with the external environment.

Finally, two caveats are herein implied. First, just because secretaries are aware of such vast amounts of correspondence does not thereby imply that he/she is either willing or interested in revealing sensitive information; most secretaries retain their position because they respect the obligation of confidentially. The point is that he/she is frequently able to answer your more general agency related questions.

Secondly, the above discussion is not meant to convey the feeling that interns should develop an insincere or Machiavellian relationship with the

secretary ("I must be nice to him/her only because he/she can be used to further my career."). The present suggestion is simply that you be forearmed with a willingness to view these employees as important agency members who deserve your respect and appreciation.

Informal Overtime. It is important to avoid viewing your placement only in terms of a formal work schedule. If there are evening or weekend meetings or conferences, GO! These extra curricular events should be viewed as important opportunities to meet people and acquire new views and information. In addition, by attending such meetings, you demonstrate to colleagues that you are an energetic individual interested in learning more about the agency.

Extra-curricular events often provide an informal environment in which to meet and discuss work related activities and ideas. One intern volunteered this very practical suggestion. When attending one of these meetings, she always locates herself at or near the center of the gathering, whether this be sitting at the middle of a table or standing in the center of a social gathering. Her explanation was simple, "This central position maximizes my possibilities of interacting with people."

Joining and/or attending meetings of local work related organizations should not be viewed as "working overtime." These activities provide a valuable opportunity to meet and discuss important issues associated with your agency. The internship, in short, should be seen as a change to begin your involvement in professionally related organizations and activities.

Sex Roles. Notwithstanding the recent concern for equality of the sexes, male and female interns function differently and are sometimes treated differently by agency personnel. While being concerned with eliminating certain unnecessary distinctions, interns can, in the meantime, exploit selected sex role differences.

One female student observed that "I don't fish with the boys." What she meant was that if males within the agency engaged in certain sporting or social activities, she probably would reject their offer to join them, since fishing, for example, was something she disliked. Unfortunately, this means that she would also miss much of the camaraderie and conversation associated with these outings. Rather than dwell on these sex role differences, our heroine decided to exploit her advantages. She gave a potluck dinner and invited several of her co-workers. A good time was had by all.

The practical point here is that male and female interns can arrange unisex or single sex outings and profit from these encounters. Baseball games, house parties, picnics, and so forth are all valuable vehicles for socializing. Take advantage of your unique interests. Design ways to bring people together. It can benefit you greatly.

Teamwork. Many if not most agency work assignments require a team effort. The ability to work in groups and cooperate in completing a task are invaluable talents to possess. This idea may represent a considerable departure from the classroom, where assignments and examinations are done on an individual basis. Hence, work related assignments usually require a great deal of interchange and cooperation. Developing the social skills necessary for surviving in this environment requires constant attention.

Interns are sometimes placed in groups where they are required to "prove" their abilities. Agency personnel usually assume a "wait and see" attitude about the student's social skills. This may be an especially difficult undertaking when the group is composed of widely divergent personalities. At the same time, it is generally understood that the group must achieve the necessary compromises in order to complete its tasks. One intern explained that someone in his office succinctly presented the argument as, "Around here

we all work together. To do otherwise implies that you think, 'Their end of the boat is sinking.'"

The prescription here is that interns be aware of the inevitability of group dynamics, and, at the same time, understand the importance of individual compromise and cooperation. As a second year student observed, "I have really learned to appreciate the old saying, 'a chain is no stronger than its weakest link.'"

Burning Bridges. Interns constantly warn against the policy of bridge burning. It may be a rewarding experience to telephone someone and point out his/her incompetence vis-a-vis a mistake he/she made in relation to your project. This may, however, be a pyrrhic victory. Most agency employees are somehow interconnected and each has the potential to grant or withhold a needed resource. This may range anywhere from information to material objects. In fact, interns concur that one of their first lessons is that, indeed, "the world is a very small place." It becomes uncomfortably apparent that bridge burning can return to haunt you.

This policy applies not only to agency personnel but faculty members and other interns as well. If you discard a fellow intern, do not be surprised if this student eventually reemerges in an academic or administrative situation where he/she is able to affect your professional circumstances. Offending another intern can be equivalent to burning two bridges.

This is not meant as a plea for quietly tolerating exploitation. The suggestion is simply that you choose your battles carefully.

Good Work. No matter the length of your placement, it is important to understand the value of doing good work. On the one hand, this reflects how much you have learned from the placement. Interns were in almost unanimous

agreement in stating that, "The more you put in, the more you get back." Hard work, in this instance, is very much to your benefit.

Equally important is the supervisor's appreciation of your good work habits. Supervisors frequently report that because an internship is a student's first brush with the real world (there is that word again), they (supervisors) receive calls from potential employers inquiring about the applicant's internship performance. Hence, a supervisor's evaluations, simply because they have few competitors, may strongly affect a former intern's chances of finding employment.

Finally, agencies report that doing good work can have a more direct influence on an intern's career options. Frequently, supervisors may decide that an intern has performed so well that he/she should be offered full-time employment upon completion of the placement. In practice, an internship represents a trial period wherein the agency gets a commitment-free view of a potential employee.

A Closed Mouth. One of the first things interns learn is that they are exposed to much confidential information. Generally, these facts assume two basic forms. First, there is formal information, that is, knowledge relating to the organization's assigned duties. For example, a student in the auditor general's office may encounter sensitive data involving a performance audit. In fact, because of this sensitive data problem, at least one XXXXXXX agency conducts background searches on its interns. Second, although perhaps working only part-time, interns are frequently exposed to informal agency information. For instance, a co-worker may relay a sordid story about the boss' spouse.

Exposure to these two information forms provides a highly effective method for building a good reputation and gaining agency respect, that is, if you develop the habit of keeping your mouth shut about what you know. Interns

constantly reiterate the observations, "Loose lips sink ships" and "A closed mouth gathers no feet." Conversely, students warn that if you are seen as one who reveals secret information (formal or informal), you should consider resigning your position. For, if you remain as an intern, your assignments and agency contacts will be practically useless concerning their educational function; co-workers will always find it difficult to trust you with important information. Building trust requires considerable time and effort. Losing this trust may require only one irresponsible conversation.

Dating Practices. Because many interns are unmarried ("eligible"), they must assess the difficulties associated with "office romances." Admittedly, this is an area of personal choice. Nevertheless, interns should understand the consequences of dating a co-worker. Perhaps most important are the problems associated with a relationship that ends on bad terms. For example, if you date a secretary for several months and then decide to terminate the relationship, do not be surprised if his/her peers respond by acting rather distant toward you. The damage here may be irreversible.

Similarly, you should consider the difficulties associated with the other extreme. If you become overly friendly with the boss, this may cause problems with practically everyone else in the office. You might encounter feelings ranging from jealousy to distrust. Some workers may view you as nothing more than a social climber.

In this and all cases involving office romances, dutifully weigh the consequences and decide whether its worth the risk. In commenting on this matter, one intern categorically rejected the idea of office romances by explaining rather graphically, "It's just stupid to date someone in the office! After all, you don't sh_t where you eat."

The Exiting Intern. If your agency has previously sponsored interns, you may find it helpful to schedule a meeting with one or more of these students. Such meetings can be especially useful for learning about the more practical aspects of a placement. For example, your discussion might include one or more of the following questions: 1) which staff members are new versus who are the veterans; 2) where to park your car; 3) inexpensive places to eat; 4) a description of possible projects; and, 5) recommended coursework. Ex-interns may also provide assistance in future decisions about job searches.

Take the initiative. Call your predecessor (s) and request that he/she meet you for lunch. The object here is to avoid a zero-based internship, that is, do not begin from scratch, solicit the insights and knowledge possessed by an ex-intern.

Insolvable Problems. Every placement entails the possibility of encountering seemingly insurmountable problems. When this happens, call the internship director for help. It is important to understand that certain problems are inherent to student internships. As problems surface and are resolved, the director develops, in turn, a standard set of procedures for reconciling these issues. Do not attempt to be overly independent. Ask for help. Many, if not most, administrative difficulties can be resolved this way.

If none of the prescribed tactics work, the director will probably advise you to discuss the problem with your supervisor. If the issue is still unresolved, it will probably be necessary for the director to schedule a meeting between himself/herself, the supervisor and you. This procedure should be utilized only as a court of last resort. One intern likened this to someone being tried and found innocent of a crime. "Even if you really are innocent," he explained, "your reputation may always be shrouded in doubt.

People might judge you as an unsavory character solely on the basis of accusations lodged against you."

Hence, some people will judge the need for a three-way conference as somehow representing failure. The argument here is not that all internship problems can be resolved without resorting to such a conference. The prescription is simply that this procedure be employed only with considerable discretion.

In general, you and the director can design effective strategies for resolving agency-related difficulties. Ask him/her for assistance. Again, do not attempt to be too independent.

The Older Worker. Interns have requested that special consideration be given to the enormous benefits associated with establishing friendships with older agency employees. Although there was no specific threshhold established for the category "older workers," it was implied that this description referred to persons fifty years of age and older.

The general consensus evolving from these student discussions was that friendships and associations are too often age bound; people generally ally themselves with others of a similar age. This can be especially stiffling for someone interested in learning about his/her agency and its role, as well as other aspects of the human condition.

Interns frequently discussed the ease with which they were able to initiate these inter-generational contacts. As one student reported, "I sat down with her in the cafeteria, it was just the two of us, and said, 'I've heard that you are very knowledgeable about this agency and I just wanted to get some suggestions on how to get the most from my internship?' How could she refuse an overture like that? From then on, we got lunch together whenever possible. And the woman's advice and observations have helped me

considerably." Initiating such discussions frequently makes it easier to meet other older workers, the old "friend of a friend" approach.

Lastly, interns reported on those exceptional older workers who possessed that amorphous quality--"wisdom." "These learned opinions," according to one intern, "saved me from a lot of embarrassing mistakes." Such sage advice, it was later reported, made the transition into the working world much easier.

An Area of Expertise. There are two opposing views concerning how the internship ought to be organized. One group reasons that students should spend a short period of time in several offices, in order to obtain a good general overview of administration. The opposite position suggests that interns develop a detailed understanding of one or two specific problem areas.

While both positions have special merits, our interns, perhaps because they are graduate students, favor the second approach. There are three reasons for this strategy. First, they generally assume that not only should an intern specialize, but he/she should develop a specific technical skill. For instance, our students emphasize computer usage, accounting skills, grant writing, studying and evaluating administrative rules, and so forth. In developing these talents, interns increase their marketability, regardless of where they finally decide to locate.

A second argument for this specialized skill approach is that your sponsor will become dependent upon your contributions. You thereby have enhanced your chances of being offered a full-time position after the placement is completed.

Third, interns observed that they were still able to spend sufficient time working with and discussing other agency activities. This, they explained, provided a sufficient understanding vis-a-vis the more general aspects of administration.

Perhaps a rule of thumb is that for short term placements, say those lasting one semester or less, a generalist approach is most appropriate. Students should move around and work with different offices, since it may be impossible to achieve an acceptable level of expertise in a particular area, given the time constraints. Conversely, for placements extending beyond one semester, generally there is adequate time to become sufficiently skilled in a particular technical area.

CONCLUSION

Hopefully, the above discussion has provided both students and faculty with a greater understanding of the internship experience. It is further hoped that our recommendations help students to not only maximize their educational opportunities vis-a-vis the "real world," but also that we might help interns avoid certain placement-associated problems.

Obviously, our list is not exhaustive. However, it should furnish the reader with an appreciation of important issues frequently related to an administrative internship. Furthermore, it is expected that intern directors will add their own recommendations to this list and provide students with an even greater understanding of their (students') specific placements.

One final suggestion is in order. Specifically, the above discussion should be read and reread throughout the course of an administrative placement. Students should be reminded of both the problems and possible solutions associated with applied study. Oftentimes, interns, like the rest of us, must be reminded to look at the road map in order to maintain a steady and comfortable course.

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